United Nations

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1392
13 May 1993

THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Tropical diseases, AIDS and diabetes among growing problems identified by World Health Organization's report; meanwhile, World Health Assembly, meeting in Geneva, calls for end to harmful health practices.

+ Stuctural adjustment policies of IMF and World Bank deprive African people of rights to dignified existence, African NGO representative tells planning Committee.

+ United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Development Programme seek to enhance cooperation.

+ UNEP Executive Director, warning that rhinoceroses could disappear, urges Governments to close illegal markets; growing rhinocerous populations in certain African countries following UNEP initiative.

* * *

Tropical diseases, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and diabetes were growing problems which left no room for complacency, the World Health Organization (WHO) said in its report on the state of the world's health for 1985 to 1990 . Cholera had spread to the Americas for the first time this century, pulmonary tuberculosis was increasing -- stimulated by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) -- and there were more cancer cases in the developing world than in developed countries.

At the same time, childhood diseases such as measles and poliomyelitis had decreased due to better immunization programmes, and cardiovascular disease had waned in developed countries because of health education. The overall death rate was decreasing globally, while life expectancy was increasing, the report said. However, gains had been overshadowed by epidemics of diseases such as cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes in the poorest countries. Those diseases had previously afflicted mainly the industrialized countries.

Meanwhile, the World Health Assembly in Geneva has called for an end to such harmful traditional practices as child marriage, dietary limitations

(more)

For information media--not an official record

during pregnancy and female genital mutilation. Those practices prejudiced the health, development and human rights of all members of society, it said.

The Assembly also marked the fifth anniversary of the WHO's declaration to eradicate poliomyelitis by the year 2000. Some 81 per cent of the world's infants were being vaccinated against the disease, and not a single case resulting from the wild polio virus had been detected in the Western hemisphere in the last year. However, Bangladesh, China, India and Pakistan accounted for 71 per cent of reported cases of poliomyelitis in 1991, and reporting in much of Africa was considered unreliable.

* * *

The structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank deprived the African people of the rights to a dignified existence and should be completely restructured, Sekai Holland, representative of a group of African non-governmental organizations said today.

She told the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Population and Development this morning that such policies undermined family planning efforts through programmes which limited women's access to needed social services. She also called for actions to stem the epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases and to end the unethical dumping of toxic wastes on African lands.

Yesterday, speakers stressed the need to reduce high infant maternal mortality rates and to provide adequate family planning services. The connection between population and poverty alleviation was also emphasized.

On Tuesday, the representative of China told the Committee that excessive population growth was a grave problem in his country with a population expected to be 1.3 billion by the end of the century. In order to control that growth, China had to prmote family planning through strengthened public education and improved contraceptive services, he said.

The representative of the United States said Tuesday that his country was determined to help lead and be part of a renewed global effort to address population problems. His Government had lifted restrictions that prohibited some family planning organizations from receiving government funding because of abortion-related activities and intended to contribute to the United Nations Population Fund.

* * *

In an effort to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) after last June's World Summit on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, consultations were held at UNEP headquarters on 5 and 6 May between senior officials of the two organizations.

(more)

The meetings were part of a continuing relationship at all levels -- global, regional and national -- to identify obstacles, as well as opportunities for enhanced collaboration between the two organizations to carry out the objectives of the Rio Conference.

One of UNDP's immediate responses to that challenge has been its Capacity 21 initiative -- a programme to help developing countries strengthen their environmental decision-making and management.

* * *

Rhinoceros populations in Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, peninsular Malaysia and India have grown since the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) started a new iniative in September 1992, according to a UNEP press release. Kenya's black rhino population had increased from around 340 in 1986 to 420 today, and not a single rhino had been poached in the country since September 1991.

Pressure by UNEP had led to the enforcement of bans on the sale of rhinocerous products in markets such as Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and China. China had banned the export of all medicines containing rhinoceros horn following a visit by UNEP's Special Envoy for rhinocerous conservation, Esmond Bradley Martin, the press release said. However, poaching had cut Zimbabwe's black rhino population from around 2,000 in 1989 to less than 400 today. In Nepal, at least 18 rhinos had been illegally killed between mid-1992 and early 1993.

UNEP Executive Director Elizabeth Dowdeswell warned that rhinoceroses could disappear altogether, and urged Governments to close down illegal markets. UNEP's Special Envoy would visit southern Africa and eastern Asia for high-level consultations on conservation issues, and the Programme would hold a conference on conservation financing in Nairobi from 28 June to 1 July.

* *** *